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**Control Mechanisms and Goal Orientations: Evidence from Frontline
Service Employees**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of goal orientations has been receiving increasing attention in studies of behavior of individuals in organizations. Goal orientations concern how individuals approach and respond to achievement situations (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005). Goal orientation theory states that individuals pursue two types of goal orientation: learning orientation and performance orientation. In a work context, a performance goal orientation leads individuals to demonstrate their competence and avoid negative evaluations of their performance, whereas a learning orientation pushes individuals to develop their competencies, namely by taking challenging tasks (Button et al., 1996). It follows that goal orientations have the potential to determine employee attitudes and behaviors in a work context. And in fact, previous research indicates that employee goal orientations have important outcomes, such as customer orientation of frontline employees (e.g., Harris et al., 2005), salesperson performance (e.g., Silver et al., 2006), job performance (Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004; Lee et al., 2006), employee creativity (Hirst et al., 2011), and training outcomes (Dierdorff et al., 2010). Consequently, influencing the goal orientations with which employees approach their work appears to be important in order to promote organizational outcomes. This implies that knowledge of those managerial practices that impact upon goal orientations would be of great value to managers.

However, despite the importance of goal orientations, the contextual factors that might influence them remain unspecified (DeShon and Gillespie, 2005). Most of the research on the antecedents of goal orientations has been focused on personal issues (see DeShon and Gillespie, 2005). This implies that endeavors aiming to enlighten the organizational practices which impact upon employees' goal orientations are of considerable value. Accordingly, the

purpose of this research is to shed light on some of the contextual antecedents. Knowledge of these will be of importance for managers, seeking to influence on an ongoing basis, their subordinates' work behaviors and attitudes and, ultimately, organizational performance.

This research investigates the extent to which control mechanisms influence employees' goal orientations. Generally, control systems relate to the set of mechanisms for aligning the behavior of individuals with those of an organization (Snell, 1992). In a different vein, a control system concerns "an organization's set of procedures for monitoring, directing, evaluating, and compensating its employees" (Anderson and Oliver, 1987, p. 76). As such, control mechanisms are an important managerial tool for influencing employees' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989; Mellewigt et al., 2011). In particular, control mechanisms provide employees with a number of cues on the appropriate behavior (and the resulting rewards) for approaching their organizational tasks (Joshi and Randall, 2001) and, thus, are likely to influence an individual's goal orientations (see DeShon and Gillespie, 2005). This view is aligned with Path Goal Theory (House, 1971, 1996), according to which individuals are likely to behave in ways that are rewarding. Not surprisingly, control mechanisms have been related to a number of employee responses, such as salesperson's trust in the sales manager (Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2006), task clarity and affective commitment (Joshi and Randall, 2001), job satisfaction, role ambiguity and role conflict (Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero, 2013; Jaworski et al., 1993), adoption of transformational leadership behaviors (Panagopoulos and Dimitriadis, 2009), and satisfaction among franchisees (Mellewigt et al., 2011).

More specifically, the contribution of this paper lies in shedding light on how two types of control mechanism, namely formal, and informal, influence employee goal orientations.

Accordingly, this research contributes to the effort to overcome an important research void, and to improve managerial effectiveness, by highlighting the effects of such controls over important employee attitudes and behaviors. In particular, this should help managers to influence the goal orientations of frontline service employees in line with an organization's aims.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Goal Orientation Research

The goal orientation literature emanates from educational psychology, attempting to explain students' achievements in the classroom (Payne et al., 2007). Goal orientation theory is a motivational approach increasingly considered as a means to explain the diverse interests and behaviors of employees in the work place, such as their reaction to feedback, work challenges, and professional developmental activities (e.g., Dweck, 1989; Harris et al., 2005; Hirst et al., 2011; Payne et al., 2007). This literature states that the goals pursued by individuals in achievement situations shape their interpretation of events and behaviors and, in particular, how they respond to failure and task difficulty (e.g., Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Heyman and Dweck, 1992).

Initially, the literature distinguished a performance and a learning goal orientation. Individuals ranking high on performance orientation are concerned with "being judged able, and one shows evidence of ability by being successful, by outperforming others, or by achieving success with little effort" (Ames and Archer, 1988, p. 260). In this endeavor, they avoid novel approaches to the execution of their jobs, for fear of damaging their performance and, thus, receiving negative evaluations of their competencies (Ames, 1992; Sujana et al.,

1994). Such employees also consider their abilities to be fixed, avoiding tasks that are difficult and looking for those in which success is likely (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002). A learning orientation is associated with the concern of developing competence through the acquisition of “new skills and mastering new situations” (VandeWalle, 1997, p. 997). Thus, employees with a learning orientation consider their abilities dynamic, enjoying and, therefore looking for, tasks that are difficult and challenging, and that sustain their personal growth (Sujan et al., 1994).

Originally, researchers postulated goal orientation to be a bipolar construct, with learning and performance goals sitting at the extremes of a continuum, implying that individuals could rank high on one orientation but not simultaneously on both (Payne et al., 2007; VandeWalle, 1997). This view was subsequently elaborated, with research considering that the two goal orientations are not mutually exclusive (e.g., Button et al., 1996). Accordingly, separate scales were developed to measure each orientation. Many researchers have followed the above two-dimensional approach to goal orientations (e.g., Bell and Kozlowski, 2002; Harris et al., 2005; Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004; Porter, 2005; VandeWalle et al., 1999). Over time, however, researchers (e.g., Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot and Church, 1997; VandeWalle, 1997) began to question this conceptualization of goal orientations, noting that the performance goal orientation contained both positive and negative facets. The positive facet concerns the desire to gain favorable judgements about one’s competence, whereas the negative one relates to the avoidance of unfavorable judgements. Thus, a three dimensional conceptualization of goal orientations has been gaining increased prevalence in the literature, partitioning the performance goal orientation into an approach and an avoidance component. The former refers to the aim of demonstrating competence and obtaining favorable judgments, and the latter focuses on avoiding the demonstration of incompetence to others and avoiding

unfavorable judgments (Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996; Hirst et al., 2011). These two dimensions of performance orientation should be related to one another, since they both share an ‘other’ referent (Elliot, 1994 in Payne et al., 2007).

The literature reveals that goal orientations may be viewed as either an individual or as a situational characteristic (e.g., Button et al., 1996; DeShon and Gillespie, 2005; Payne et al., 2007). Thus, contextual factors may have an impact on individual goal orientations. Given the important outcomes associated with goal orientations, past research investigated its determinants. Most of this research has looked at the personal drivers of goal orientations. This means that we have some knowledge on the constellation of personal factors associated with specific goal orientations. However, studies on the situational or contextual determinants of goal orientations are scarce. In fact, DeShon and Gillespie (2005) note that the situational factors that might influence goal orientations remain unspecified. Some of the few exceptions include Chonko et al. (2002), who develop a theoretical framework (not empirically tested) in which contextual variables such as organizational culture and climate, and organizational policies, affect individual learning orientation; Wang and Netemeyer (2002), who considered job autonomy as an antecedent of learning effort; and Hartline et al. (2003), who determined customer-oriented strategy and formalized organizational structure to be conducive to social/professional control. Therefore, the few studies that have looked at the contextual factors provide an incomplete view of the set of managerial practices that may be engendered by managers in order to foster the desired goal orientations in their subordinates. We thus aim to address this void by investigating the extent to which a contextual factor, control mechanisms, relates to employees’ goal orientations.

2.2. Marketing Control Systems

A marketing control system refers to management activities to influence the attitudes and behaviors of employees in desirable ways (Jaworski, 1988; Oliver and Anderson, 1994). This may include the procedures involved in “monitoring, directing, evaluating, and compensating” a firm’s employees (Anderson and Oliver, 1987, p. 76). As such, marketing control mechanisms aimed at employees should ultimately contribute to organizational performance (see Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2006; Hartline et al., 2000; Piercy et al., 2004). In fact, control mechanisms have been related with a number of employee responses positive for organizational outcomes (e.g., Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2006; Mellewigt et al., 2011; Piercy et al., 2004).

Jaworski (1988) identifies two basic forms of control, namely formal and informal control mechanisms. Formal control mechanisms consist in written, management-initiated mechanisms seeking to influence the behaviors of employees in ways that promote organizational performance (Merchant, 1988; Jaworski, 1988, Lusch and Jaworski, 1991). Similar to other studies (e.g., Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2006; Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989; Mellewigt et al., 2011; Rijdsdijk and Ende, 2011), two types of formal controls termed ‘process or behavior-based’ and ‘output’ controls are examined here. Process or behavior-based control refers to the extent to which managers seek to influence the way employees perform their jobs (Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989; Snell, 1992), namely by monitoring, evaluating, and compensating the behaviors and/or activities implemented by employees to attain desired goals (Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2006; Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Thus, “behavior control encourages salesperson input to the selling process, such as sales call planning and customer relationship building” (Piercy et al., 2004, p. 30). Accordingly, employees’ compensation relies on a fixed salary to a greater extent (Piercy et al., 2012). As to output control, it refers to the specification of outputs sought by the organization, with the employees being

responsible for their achievement (Mellewigt et al., 2011). Accordingly, rewards are contingent on reaching output standards (Rijsdijk and Ende, 2011), with compensation relying to a greater extent on incentives (Cravens et al., 1993; Piercy et al., 2012).

Informal controls are unwritten control mechanisms, usually initiated by employees, with the purpose of influencing employee behavior (Jaworski, 1988). However, as Jaworski points out, these controls are not necessarily congruent with a firm's objectives. Jaworski (1988) considers three types of informal control, namely self, professional, and cultural controls. Self-control characterizes individuals who establish personal objectives, monitor the extent to which these are achieved, and adjust their behavior accordingly (Jaworski, 1988). Professional controls take place when co-operation, mutual trust, collegial interaction, and informal evaluation of a unit's employees are fostered (Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989). Under this system, the work unit establishes standards, monitors their application, and takes action in case of deviations (Jaworski, 1988). Finally, cultural control refers to an institutionalized mechanism that seeks to influence employee behavior through the gradual accumulation of an organization's norms, rituals, and values (Jaworski, 1988).

Both formal and informal control mechanisms tend to coexist in organizations (Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989; Joshi and Randall, 2001). Accordingly, our model (see Figure 1) considers both types of control. Thus, we attempt to explain employees' goal orientations by looking at the potential explanatory role of five control mechanisms. Our research propositions are subsequently explained.

Insert Figure 1 about here

2.3. Research Hypotheses

2.3.1. The influence of formal control mechanisms

We examine the impact of two formal control mechanisms on goal orientations: behavior-based control and output control. *Behavior-based control* “emphasizes the monitoring, directing, evaluating, and rewarding the behaviors of salespeople” (Panagopoulos and Dimitriadis, 2009, p. 1011). These control mechanisms try to influence the means through which outcomes are achieved (Jaworski, 1988). When employee evaluation is based on behavioral criteria, managers give employees responsibility for their behaviors as well more control over the matters that influence their evaluations, with employees responding with feelings of greater satisfaction, and of greater competence and adaptability (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Under such a system, frontline employees are evaluated and rewarded upon criteria such as effort, customer orientation, commitment, and their proficiency at working out solutions to customer problems (Bowen and Schneider, 1985; Reardon and Enis, 1990), and this stimulates employees to seek new knowledge. Moreover, such a system encompasses a long term horizon. Results are assumed to appear in the long-term as long as prescribed behaviors are adopted by employees (Anderson and Oliver, 1987). This means that “time can be taken to learn company products and procedures, as well as appropriate sales techniques” (Oliver and Anderson, 1994, p. 54). Cravens et al. (1993) determined that the extent to which managers monitored salespeople’s activities was positively related to salespeople’s professional competence, and Hartline and Ferrell (1996) found that it was related to employee adaptability (the employee ability to adapt to the demands of the service encounter).

Individuals with a performance-approach orientation are more concerned with achieving the outcomes of high performance; and people with a performance avoidance orientation are more concerned with avoiding the consequences of poor performance (Hirst et al., 2009). Under a behavior-based evaluation system, employees “do not have to “perform” in output terms (e.g., show high current sales) as long as they carefully follow the organization’s formula for success” (Oliver and Anderson, 1994, p. 54). Accordingly, changes in employee rewards are based upon employees’ inputs (e.g., knowledge acquisition, sales calls, sales strategies), rather than their outcomes (Anderson and Oliver, 1987). As employees subjected to behavior-based control systems are not evaluated by the outputs they attain, they should be less concerned with achieving high performance outputs and the consequences of poor performance. In summary, behavior-based control systems drive employees to learn, and remove the pressure of achieving high levels of performance and avoiding low performance. Accordingly, we predict the following hypotheses:

H1a: Behavior-based control is positively related to learning orientation.

H1b: Behavior-based control is negatively related to performance approach orientation.

H1c: Behavior-based control is negatively related to performance avoidance orientation.

Output control is exercised when an employee is evaluated in terms of the results relative to established performance standards (Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989). Hence, organizations applying output controls compensate their employees according to the extent to which they achieve certain results, such as profits or sales generated (Joshi and Randall, 2001). Thus, they signal to employees that for the organization it is important to achieve end-results. Such systems tend to motivate employees to focus on activities with immediate payoffs (Anderson and Oliver, 1987) and, thus, to neglect those with long-term benefits. Oliver and Anderson

(1994, p. 56) add that employees under an outcome system “view time to train and learn as time out of the field (with a high opportunity cost) and are relatively unwilling to experiment with new products and approaches ... may neglect activities with a long-term payoff such as planning and spending time on nonselling activities”. Thus, such controls are likely to curtail employees’ motivation to learn and apply new, untested techniques, as these may adversely affect the attainment of goals, at least in the short-term. Learning is a time-consuming activity, and may divert the focus away from key performance criteria. In support of this, learning orientation has been shown to be negatively related to short-term goals (Harris et al., 2005). Likewise, it has been suggested that learning may only produce benefits in long-term performance, thus appearing undiscernible in short-term performance evaluations (Kohli et al., 1998). This might be particularly the case in frontline settings, where it takes time to develop a relationship with customers and to learn about their needs.

When managers focus on output control, they emphasize the achievement of end outcomes (Brown et al., 2005). In addition, under an output control system, employees are controlled mostly by incentive compensation (Cravens et al., 1993). This means that those salespeople not delivering outcomes will see their compensation adversely affected (Anderson and Oliver, 1987). The reliance on outcome controls pressures employees to obtain quick results, the reason why “they may move more quickly and decisively to close an order and may ‘knock on more doors’, motivated by the prospect of more orders” (Oliver and Anderson, 1994, p. 56). As a result, output control serves to directly enhance the accountability of the employee for output performance (Flaherty and Pappas, 2012). Accordingly, setting performance standards, and measuring and rewarding sales outcomes should drive employees’ motivation to achieve higher performance outputs and avoid the consequences of poor performance. Consequently, we predict the following:

H2a: Output control is negatively related with learning orientation.

H2b: Output control is positively related with performance approach orientation.

H2c: Output control is positively related with performance avoidance orientation.

2.3.2. The influence of informal control mechanisms

We now examine the influence of three informal mechanisms on goal orientations. The impact of self-control, professional control, and cultural control on goal orientations will be discussed in turn.

Self-control refers to situations in which the employee establishes his/her own goals, monitors them, and adjusts his/her own behavior if off course (Jaworski, 1988). Thus, an employee with high self-control takes responsibility for work done (Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989). The notion of self-control can be traced back to the intrinsic motivation concept (Lusch and Jaworski, 1991). Intrinsic motivation can be defined as the extent to which an employee is excited about a work activity and is motivated to engage in it for the sake of the activity itself (Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Shalley et al., 2004). This motivation concentrates employees' attention on the heuristic aspects of tasks (Woodman et al., 1993) and contributes to the exploration of new pathways (Amabile et al., 1990). Additionally, it drives employees to work longer on problems (Oldham and Cummings, 1996). Moreover, employees with a higher learning orientation "tend to engage in deep processing, which involves elaboration, critical thinking, and the integration of new information with prior knowledge and experience in general" (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002, p. 499). This suggests that self-control should be a precursor to learning orientation, given that intrinsic motivation fosters individuals' interest and excitement with work.

Self-control means that employees take more responsibility for the work they produce (Jaworski and MacInnis, 1989), and attaining end-results is part of one's job. Accordingly, individuals ranking high on self-control are likely to strive for the attainment of certain performance standards, as well as to avoid low performance outcomes. Anticipation of the latter would drive them to take corrective action, such as redefining their goals and realigning work strategies. This would improve their performance prospects and, thus, would contribute to fulfill their job responsibilities (see Agarwal, 1996). Since selling is a complex task and frontline employees have greater information over their customers than their supervisors, it is likely that self-control is a very effective control mechanism to increase employees' performance (Agarwal, 1996). Not surprisingly, self-control has been linked to higher job performance in terms of quality and quantity of work produced (Oldham, 1976). We thus offer the following:

H3a: Self-control is positively related to learning orientation.

H3b: Self-control is positively related to performance approach orientation.

H3c: Self-control is positively related to performance avoidance orientation.

Professional control occurs when the “work unit establishes certain standards (norms), monitors conformity, and takes action when social deviations occur ... The direction for control comes from the internalization of values and mutual commitment toward some common goal” (Jaworski, 1988, p. 27). Thus, professional control directs the work activities of individuals as well as the social behavior within the work unit, and promotes group cohesiveness (Hartline et al., 2000). Jaworski and MacInnis (1989) further note that such control systems promote co-operation, and job-related discussions. Accordingly, in a cohesive

work unit it is likely that each individual expresses his/her ideas about how the job should be done, and that together colleagues discuss each other's activities, share and add knowledge from each other's experience, and help each other with work-related problems. Moreover, useful feedback from peers signals that they appreciate change and improvements, and this is likely to drive employees to believe that the work unit members accept and support the search for novel ways of carrying out the work activities (Zhou and George, 2001). Additionally, Madjar (2005) notes that the interaction between unit members is likely to promote wider interests. Thus, we expect professional controls to fuel an employee's learning orientation.

Moreover, we expect this type of control to reduce employees' performance orientation, since compliance with group norms and group cohesion discourages motivations to outperform others. The term 'motivation loss' in the social psychology literature (Steiner, 1972) may also help to explain this relationship. Motivation loss results when an individual reduces his or her effort because of the feeling that he or she will not be recognized or directly benefit from his or her personal efforts (Worchel et al., 1998), as well as the desire not to be taken advantage of by the group (Jackson and Harkins, 1985). This suggests that professional control should reduce employees' concerns with output achievements. We thus predict the following:

H4a: Professional control is positively related to learning orientation.

H4b: Professional control is negatively related to performance approach orientation.

H4c: Professional control is negatively related to performance avoidance orientation.

Finally, *cultural control* refers to an institutionalized mechanism that guides employee behavior through the gradual accumulation of organizational stories, norms, and rituals (Jaworski, 1988). This type of control can encourage the employee to search for new

information and strategies to deal with existing problems, thereby enhancing learning orientation. Cultural control focuses on transmitting the required organizational values to employees as an on-going process through their organizational life (Harris and Ogbonna, 2011). As a consequence, employees' values become closely aligned with the values of the organization. This attachment to an organization is important because employees who strongly believe in the values of the organization are more likely to exert an extra effort in order to promote the accomplishment of an organization's goals (Mowday et al., 1979). Moreover, studies have shown that individuals who share the same vision and are in agreement with the direction the organization is taking, are more motivated to learn (Senge, 2006; Sinkula et al., 1997). Similarly, Jaworski et al. (1993) state that employees in jobs that take more time to learn can be expected to rely to a greater extent on the values and beliefs of the organization. Not surprisingly, such control has been considered key for non-routine positions involving task customization (Mills, 1985), as is the case for positions frequently occupied by frontline service employees.

In addition, by promoting the integration of the individual within the organization, cultural control should reduce individuals' motivations to outperform others, as well as reduce fears about not attaining high performance levels. It is possible that the performance consequences of employee behaviors in services only emerge in the medium to the long-term, because it takes time for employees to get to know their customers and to develop a long-term relationship with them (see Kohli et al., 1998). Ouchi (1979, p. 844) notes that in such uncertain contexts, output measurement is not possible, and that it is highly appropriate to rely on "ritualized, ceremonial forms of control. ... Because ceremonial forms of control explicitly are unable to exercise monitoring and evaluation of anything but attitudes, values and beliefs, and because attitudes, values and beliefs are typically acquired more slowly than are manual

or cognitive abilities, ceremonial forms of control require the stability of membership which characterizes the clan.” In a similar vein, Jaworski (1988) also notes that cultural control is a mechanism more appropriate than objective performance standards for non-routine jobs, as are undertaken by frontline employees. Given the focus of this control on commitment to “socially prescribed behaviors” (Ouchi, 1979, p. 838), employees’ concerns with the extent to which certain targets are achieved should be reduced. Accordingly, we predict the following:

H5a: Cultural control is positively related to learning orientation.

H5b: Cultural control is negatively related to performance approach orientation.

H5c: Cultural control is negatively related to performance avoidance orientation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The study was conducted in a services setting due to the role of frontline service employees in ensuring the delivery of service quality and customer satisfaction (e.g., Bitner et al., 1990), a superior customer experience (cf. Grewal et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009), and in ensuring customer loyalty (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000, 2008). This implies that frontline service employees’ behaviors have quite a marked impact on service organizations’ performance. Accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to guide the behavior of service employees in a manner that is consistent with organizational interests, and control mechanisms serve that purpose. Consequently, understanding the effects of control mechanisms in influencing the goal orientations of frontline service employees is of theoretical and practical value. Financial services were chosen because of the high contact nature of the setting, meaning employees have a non-routine interaction with customers. Not surprisingly, similar issues have been studied in this same context (e.g., Harris et al., 2006; Licata et al., 2003).

To collect the data we obtained the collaboration of a Brazilian bank. A total of 1,200 questionnaires were distributed via the bank's internal mail to its frontline service employees, excluding branch managers, who received a pack containing a cover letter, a questionnaire, and a return envelope, which was collected through the bank's internal mail. A few days later, an email was sent to the bank's employees motivating their participation in the study. We obtained 258 usable questionnaires, giving a net response rate of 21.5%. We evaluated the extent of non-response bias by considering an extrapolation approach suggested by Armstrong and Overton (1977). Extrapolation methods rely on the idea that those responding less readily are similar to non-respondents (Pace, 1939, in Armstrong and Overton, 1977). Additionally, "'less readily' has been defined as answering later, or as requiring more prodding to answer" (Armstrong and Overton, 1977, p. 397). We subsequently distributed 150 questionnaires through bank employees participating in training sessions who had not responded before to the questionnaire. The envelopes with the questionnaires were collected later. We obtained 38 useful questionnaires, giving a 25.3% response rate. Next, we analyzed whether the two sets of respondents differed on the variables of interest as well as on demographics, and no significant differences were detected. Moreover, the response rate associated with these two collection periods is fairly similar. This is evidence that non-response bias should not be significant. Given that no significant differences emerged, we combined the two datasets. Thus, at the end we have a total of 296 usable responses, giving an overall response rate of 21.9%. Among the respondents, 67.1% were male, 39.9% were up to 30 years of age, and 60.5% had been working in the bank for up to five years. All employees had service delivery responsibilities.

3.2. Measurement

The questionnaire relies on previously-validated scales. *Behavior-based control* is from Hartline et al. (2000). *Output control*, *professional control*, and *self-control* are based on the work of Jaworski and MacInnis (1989). *Cultural control* is based on Jaworski et al. (1993). Finally, *learning orientation* is from Harris et al. (2005), and *performance orientation* and *performance avoidance* from Elliot and Church (1997). We subjected all measures to confirmatory factor analysis to assess their psychometric properties. The initial model fit was not adequate. Subsequently, scale purification was conducted in order to improve model fit and attain scale validity. Essentially, we eliminated items with large modification indices associated with measurement error covariances and low loadings in the corresponding latent construct. The results from the estimation of the final CFA model indicate that the chi-square is significant (chi-square = 558.563, df = 322, $p < 0.001$; chi-square/df = 1.74), but we also assessed additional fit indices: comparative fit index (CFI=0.945), Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI = .935), incremental fit index (IFI = .946), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .050). These fit indexes are inside conventional cut-off values. Table 2 presents the variables' standard deviations, correlations, Cronbach alphas, and average variances extracted. There is evidence of convergent validity and unidimensionality, given that all items load with large and highly significant coefficients on their specified constructs. All of the Cronbach alphas exceed the .70 level. As to the average variances extracted, all exceed the .50 mark but performance avoidance (.47), as well as the squared correlations between any pair of constructs, indicating discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In summary, the results provide evidence of scale reliability, unidimensionality, and of convergent and discriminant validity.

Finally, maximum likelihood assumes the multivariate normality of variables, an assumption rarely met in research (Curran et al., 1996; Lei and Lomax, 2005), and our data is no exception. Previous research determined that maximum likelihood is robust to modest

deviations from normality (see Fan and Wang, 1998; Lei and Lomax, 2005), and our data is consistent with such a pattern, meaning that such a deviation does not threaten the findings and interpretations.

Insert Table 1 & 2 about here

4. RESULTS

Because of the complexity of the model and the need to test the relationships between the constructs simultaneously, structural equations were used by applying the maximum likelihood (ML) method (Amos version 20). The overall chi-square for the model was significant (chi-square = 616.510, df = 325, $p < .001$; chi-square/df = 1.90). We therefore examined the structural diagnostics for relative global fit suggested by Bollen (1989). As with the CFA model, the other measures of fit were: CFI = .932, TLI = .921, IFI = .933, and RMSEA=.055. Given that all the fit indices were inside conventional cut-off values, the model was deemed acceptable. The results are discussed next (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

A description of the results of hypotheses testing follows. It was found that behavior-based control positively affects learning orientation and has a negative impact on performance

avoidance orientation, thus supporting H1a and H1c, respectively. Surprisingly, behavior-based control is not directly related to performance approach orientation. Therefore, we do not obtain support for H1b. Output control was only found to have a significant positive impact on performance avoidance orientation ($p < 0.05$), which is consistent with H2c. No significant effect was found between output control and learning orientation (H2a) and performance approach orientation (H2b). Self-control was found to have both a positive impact on performance approach orientation ($p < 0.001$) and on performance avoidance orientation ($p < 0.01$), thereby supporting H3b and H3c, respectively. However, it does not exert any significant direct effect on learning orientation. Thus, the results fail to support H3a. Unexpectedly, the effects of professional control on goal orientations were contrary to our prediction in H4. Specifically, professional control was found to have a negative impact on learning orientation ($p < 0.05$), and a positive influence on both performance approach and performance avoidance orientation. The findings show that cultural control has a positive impact on learning orientation, thus supporting H5a. The results also supported a negative impact of cultural control on performance approach and performance avoidance orientations, in line with H5b and H5c, respectively. Finally, the R^2 for the endogenous variables learning orientation, performance approach and performance avoidance orientations are .13, .21, and .20, respectively. These values are not negligible, considering the potential set of personal and contextual variables that might affect goal orientations, and are comparable with those obtained in other studies (e.g., Kohli et al., 1998).

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Goal orientation theory has gained increasing importance in explaining employees' attitudes and behaviors in the work place (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Hirst et al., 2011). However, despite the importance of goal orientations, limited research has been undertaken in respect of the antecedents of goal orientations. Those studies that have examined the determinants of goal orientations focused on the personal factors (e.g. Harris et al., 2005), while studies on the situational or contextual determinants of goal orientations are scarce. Our work contributes to this gap by revealing the influence of marketing control mechanisms, a contextual factor, on frontline service employee goal orientations. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that examines the impact of control mechanisms on employees' goal orientation. In addition, our study suggests several implications for managers to consider when implementing marketing control mechanisms in their organizations.

Overall, our results suggest that formal and informal control mechanisms play a significant role in explaining employees' goal orientations. Specifically, our findings indicate that behavior-based evaluation is positively related to learning orientation. This result is consistent with our hypothesis and shows that these evaluations stimulate the employee to seek and learn new knowledge. We also found support for our hypothesis that behavior-based evaluation is negatively related to performance avoidance orientation. Surprisingly, output control was only found to have a significant impact on performance avoidance orientation. A possible explanation for this result is that the jobs of frontline service employees tend to be rather unstructured and employees must be flexible in order to address the heterogeneous needs of their customers (Sousa and Coelho, 2011). As a result, management may find it difficult to establish and rely on formal output controls, given the low standardization of tasks (Hartline et al., 2000).

In comparison to these findings, informal control mechanisms were found to play a more significant role explaining employees' goal orientations. Except for the relationship between self-control and learning orientation, all the other informal control mechanisms were found to significantly influence employees' goal orientations. In relation to self-control, it has a positive impact on performance approach and performance avoidance orientation. This emphasizes the importance of today's organizations creating an atmosphere that allows managers to drive employees to take on more responsibility for the work they produce, at least whenever the organization's concern is on short-term performance. Cultural control was also found to significantly influence employees' goal orientations. This result is novel and challenges previous studies that suggested that cultural control is illusory and that any changes in employee behavior linked to it are likely to be superficial (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990; Willmott, 1993).

The results associated with professional control are particularly interesting since they contradict our hypotheses. Thus, against expectations, professional control was found to be negatively related to learning orientation. Learning orientation is an internal mind-set that motivates an individual to develop his or her competence and seek challenges that provide learning opportunities (Ames and Archer, 1988; Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Gong et al., 2009). This focus on new challenges and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge may be in conflict with professional control, which monitors conformity and establishes norms and standards that should be adhered to. Thus, the presence of professional control may impose constraints on the individuals' learning orientation. Given some unexpected findings, Lusch and Jaworski (1991) also speculated on the detrimental effects associated with professional controls, including over-socialization.

On the other hand, our results also suggest that professional control is positively related to performance approach and avoidance orientations, thereby contradicting our hypotheses (H4b and H4c). While individuals with high levels of learning orientation are more likely to seek new challenges and new ways of dealing with existing problems, which may be in conflict with standard procedures, highly performance-oriented individuals prefer to follow standard procedures for doing things. Studies have indicated that performance-oriented employees tend to devote their attention to surface processing and practising in-role job components that may help them to outperform others (Elliot, 1999; Elliot and McGregor, 2001; Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004). Fisher and Ford (1998) also found that performance-oriented individuals are more likely to rehearse task strategies and familiar task components until they become rapid and automatic. This focus on surface processing and practising in-role job components further reinforces and establishes the existing framework for doing things, thereby emphasizing the role of professional control for performance-oriented individuals.

Overall, these findings illustrate that different control mechanisms produce different outcomes in terms of employees' goal orientations, and suggest that organizations can use control mechanisms in order to influence the goal orientations of their employees in a manner that is consistent with organizational priorities. Accordingly, this study yields a number of relevant implications for managers. The goal orientations held by frontline employees have important consequences for organizations' outcomes (e.g., Harris et al., 2005; Kohli et al., 1998; Wang and Netemeyer, 2002). This implies that recruiting and selecting employees with certain goal orientations is of primary importance for managers. Past research provides guidelines that are useful for managers wanting to recruit and select employees with specific goal orientations (see Payne et al., 2007). However, past research is sparse in respect of the contextual practices that may be engendered by managers to instil, on an ongoing basis,

specific goal orientations in individuals. This study indicates that managers can influence their employees' goal orientations by putting into action a co-ordinated set of control mechanisms. Specifically, the results suggest that managers, apart from recruiting and selecting employees with certain goal predispositions, can also influence the goal orientations of their workforce by relying on a mix of formal and informal mechanisms. Moreover, the results highlight the role of informal controls in shaping employee goal orientations. In this context, Gomez and Sanchez (2005, p. 1848) note that firms increasingly rely on informal controls, which "are more subtle and intangible", more in line with the growing need for innovation and flexibility. Therefore, managers should pay particular attention to the management of self-control, as well as to professional and cultural controls as ways to foster their employees' goal orientations.

6 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study uncovered a number of novel findings that must be considered in tandem with its limitations. The research is based on cross-sectional data, and this limits causality inferences. A longitudinal study would more precisely ascertain whether the control mechanisms in play at a certain moment really influence the goal orientations held by employees in a subsequent period. The results also rely on data from a single company, and from a very specific sector, banking. Although not uncommon (see, for example, Hirst et al., 2011; Kohli et al., 1998), this clearly casts some doubts on the generalizability of the findings. Thus, replicating the study in other industries and countries would provide evidence of external validity. Notwithstanding, we note that the findings usually conform to predictions that were developed using a general, theoretical reasoning.

Another limitation concerns the reliance on a single informant, raising the issue of common method variance. To address this issue we followed the suggestions by Podsakoff et al. (2003) and adopted a number of procedural remedies in order to minimise the possibility of common method variance. In particular, we took the following procedures: 1) respondents were ensured of the anonymous and confidential nature of the study, which should have reduced social desirability bias and contributed to obtain respondents' true feelings; 2) respondents were not told of the specific purpose of the research or of its conceptual framework, thereby avoiding any resulting bias; 3) the employees were motivated to respond through a reminder email, and it was stated in the cover letter that their response was crucial to the success of the research; 4) item ambiguity and biased responding were also mitigated by relying on previously validated scales, by labelling each response scale point, and by obtaining feedback about the questionnaire from three management scholars, a marketing professional with experience in consumer surveys, and several frontline employees; 5) finally, the questionnaire contained different blocks where the dependent and independent variables were placed, so as to create a proximal separation amongst them. We also conducted some statistical tests in order to ascertain the extent of common method variance. The procedure we adopted (see Chaudhuri and Ligas, 2009) consists of comparing simpler with more complex confirmatory factor analyses models. If common method variance exists to a great extent, then simpler models (fewer factors) should fit the data better or as well as more complex (i.e., more factors) models. We thus conducted several chi-square difference tests, which indicated that larger, more complex models fitted the data better than simpler models. Moreover, we obtained the best fit to the data when we specified all the factors in the model. Accordingly, the results suggest that common method variance should not be of much concern.

It is also possible that the relationship between control mechanisms and goal orientations might be moderated by other variables, namely personal and contextual variables, and this could be pursued by future research. Moreover, there is a vast array of contextual variables that managers can manipulate in order to influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. Thus, future research could explore how other contextual variables affect employee goal orientations. Despite these issues this work provides substantive results, and hopefully will stimulate others to continue investigating this important topic.

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Figure 1

The research model: Control mechanisms and the goal orientations of frontline service employees

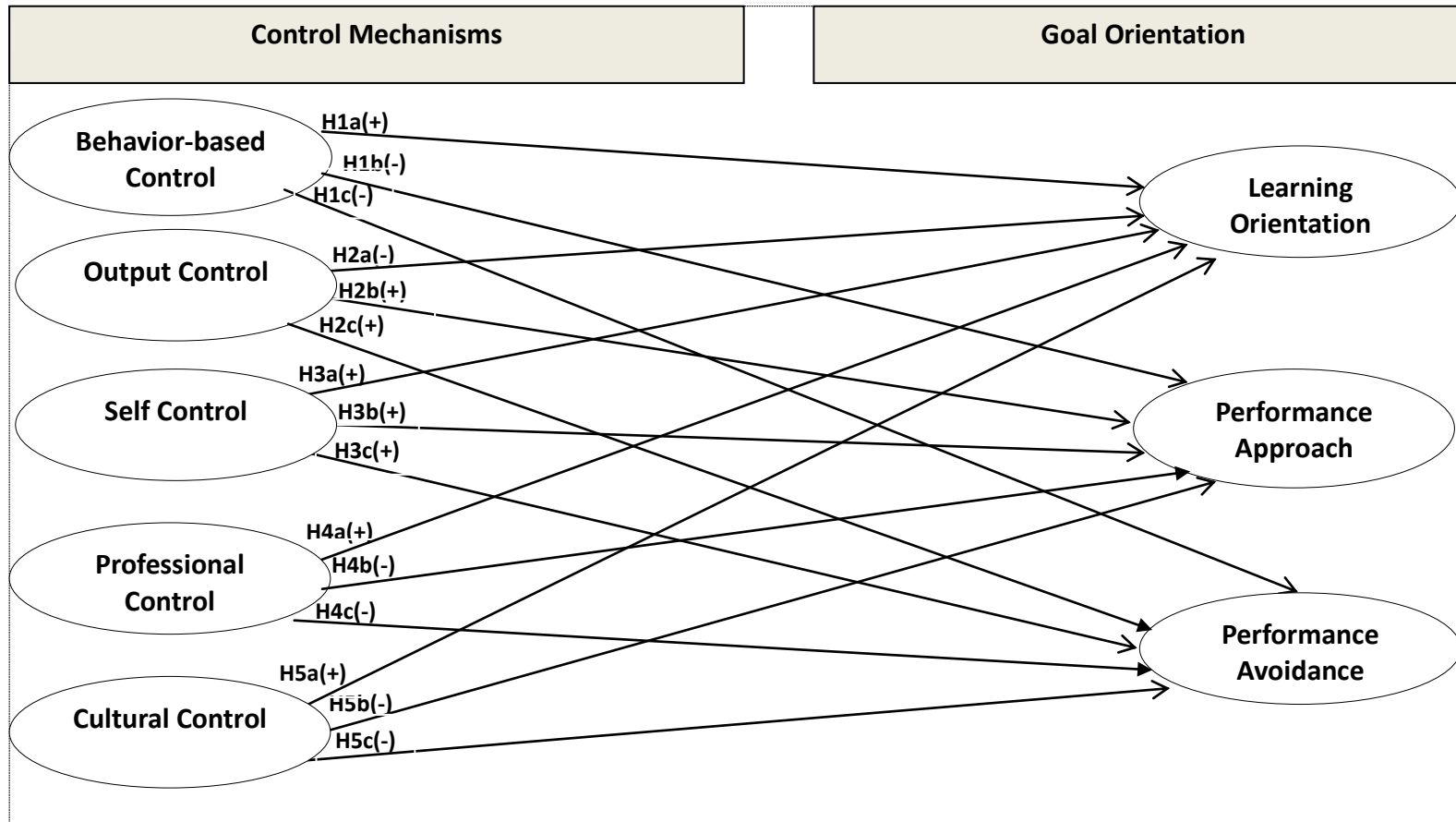


Table 1
Measurement model

Items	Stand. Coef.	t-value
Learning orientation		
An important part of being a good employee is continuously improving your skills in serving customers	0.60	10.503
I am always learning something new with my customers	0.71	14.305
It is worth the time I spend learning new approaches to deal with customers	0.82	15.381
Learning how to serve customers better is extremely important to me	0.81	15.144
Performance avoidance		
My fear of performing poorly is often what motivates me	0.76	13.213
I'm afraid that if I ask my supervisor a 'dumb' question, he/she might not think I'm very smart	0.60	10.417
I often think to myself "what if I do badly in my job?"	0.69	11.048
Performance approach		
I am motivated by the thought of outperforming my peers in this branch	0.79	16.053
It is important to me to do better in this job than the other branch employees	0.86	17.85
I am striving to demonstrate my abilities relative to others in this branch	0.90	19.011
It is important to me to do well compared to others in this branch	0.73	13.968
Behavior based control		
My manager evaluates whether I provide a courteous service to customers	0.79	15.684
My manager evaluates my ability to resolve customer complaints or service problems in an efficient manner	0.90	19.206
My manager evaluates my ability to deal innovatively with unique situations and/or discover customer needs	0.84	17.409
My commitment to customers is evaluated by my supervisor	0.75	14.829
Output control		
My supervisor establishes specific performance goals for my job	0.85	17.449
My supervisor monitors the extent to which I attain my performance goals	0.87	17.946
If my performance goals were not met, I would be required to explain why	0.75	14.798
Self-control		
The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job	0.70	12.929
The work I do in this job is very meaningful to me	0.59	10.574
It would be very difficult to break the strong relationship I have with my job	0.71	12.959
Most of the time I enjoy being involved with my job	0.72	13.447
Most of the important things in my life are related to my job	0.81	15.813
Professional control		
Most of the branch employees are familiar with each other's productivity	0.66	12.088
This branch encourages job-related discussions between employees	0.85	16.36
The majority of the employees are able to make an accurate appraisal of each other's work	0.69	12.075
Cultural control		
My work environment encourages me to feel a part of this branch	0.92	19.436
My work environment encourages me to be proud of this branch	0.91	19.187

Table 2

Standard deviation, correlation matrix, reliability, and variance extracted estimates

	SD	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	AVE
Behavior-based control (X1)	.89	.89								.68
Output control (X2)	1.39	.67	.86							.69
Professional control (X3)	1.07	.50	.58	.78						.55
Cultural control(X4)	1.18	.33	.41	.69	.91					.84
Self Control (X5)	1.31	.33	.34	.45	.37	.83				.51
Learning Orientation (X6)	.33	.25	.10	.05	.17	.14	.82			.55
Performance-Approach (X7)	1.32	.14	.15	.21	.12	.42	-.08	.89		.67
Performance-Avoidance (X8)	1.44	.14	.29	.32	.17	.31	-.02	.58	.72	.47

Note: The main diagonal shows the Cronbach alpha

Table 3

Results of the Structural Model

Path	Hyp.	Coef.	t-value	
Behavior-based Control--- > Learning Orientation	H1a(+)	.367	3.592	**
Behavior-based Control --- >Performance Approach Orientation	H1b(-)	-.060	-.679	
Behavior-based Control --- >Performance Avoidance Orientation	H1c(-)	-.195	-1.924	*
Output control--- > Learning Orientation	H2a(-)	-.115	-1.081	
Output control--- > Performance Approach Orientation	H2b(+)	.017	.177	
Output control--- > Performance Avoidance Orientation	H2c(+)	.223	1.998	*
Self-control--- > Learning Orientation	H3a(+)	.084	1.071	
Self-control--- > Performance Approach Orientation	H3b(+)	.423	5.507	**
Self-control--- > Performance Avoidance Orientation	H3c(+)	.251	3.013	**
Professional control--- > Learning Orientation	H4a(+)	-.309	-2.292	*
Professional control--- > Performance Approach Orientation	H4b(-)	.202	1.672	*
Professional control--- > Performance Avoidance Orientation	H4c(-)	.329	2.366	**
Cultural control--- > Learning Orientation	H5a(+)	.281	2.678	**
Cultural control--- > Performance Approach Orientation	H5b(-)	-.180	-1.911	*
Cultural control--- > Performance Avoidance Orientation	H5c(-)	-.198	-1.848	*
Goodness of fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 616.510$, $df = 325$ ($p < .01$); IFI = .933; TLI= .921; CFI= .932; RMSEA= .055				

Note: Tests of hypotheses are based on one-tail tests